

Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments
Appropriations Hearing
HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
Department of Housing
Wednesday, February 16th, 2022

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Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on House Bill 5037 (AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023). I am here to discuss the important investments through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is Jennifer Paradis and I work in **Milford, CT** and am a resident of **Middletown, CT**.

I serve as Executive Director of the Beth-El Center, Inc. Last year, we served over 500 people in our emergency shelter programs and served over 35,000 meals our soup kitchen. We are proud members of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut.

As you listen to hours of testimony today, and take on the task of reconciling the needs of so many, I ask that you make strategic investments, investing in the right that preserves all others. As you review asks from DOC, DMHAS, DDS, DOL, DSS and other important partners, do so with the understanding that there are people experiencing homelessness within each of those populations. 1/5 of those Justice impacted have experienced homelessness, over 80% of households who sought services at the Beth-El Center alone in 2021 listed a disability as their primary factor contributing to homelessness. Although our PIT count only identifies slightly over 600 homeless students, over 5000 were identified through SDE in the same year (2018). Centering the work of ending homelessness is fulfilling your obligations to support all of the vulnerable populations noted above.

With all of this said, I must share that while our state looks to move forward from the difficult years of the COVID-19 pandemic, our crisis response efforts are just beginning. A failure to invest in the homeless response system over decades had left us struggling to respond to the needs of today. Although we are serving more in our system daily we are forced to use waitlists and prioritize "the most vulnerable" for access to the lifesaving intervention of a warm bed, leaving many out in the cold. Today, DOH investments only cover approximately 30% of our total program expenses. This is not enough to meet our staffing needs for our emergency shelter, (even though our frontline line workers are making less than \$15.00/hour) and leaves us with a deficient in meeting the additional program expenses like; fridge, healthcare, commercial insurance, administrative expenses and program expenses like the transportation, food, and basic needs for clients and training /development for staff. To be clear, at this time state investments of this program would not even allow us to staff it. Today, because of this, we have staff near homelessness and falling into homelessness themselves.

We respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions from the Governor's budget for the Department of Housing (DOH):

- We support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance long term plan to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits, which includes housing and homeless service organizations
- We also support providing an additional \$13.34 million in FY 23 (\$8.08 million at DOH and \$5.26 million at DMHAS) to provide homeless and housing service organizations funding for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers, increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology via:
 - \$7.47 million increase in DOH Housing/Homeless Services line
 - \$169K increase in DOH Municipal Housing/Homeless Services line
 - \$436K increase in DOH Homeless Youth line
- We support an additional \$2.3 million in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line to provide critical staff infrastructure support to Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) and 2-1-1. CANs provide streamlined access to the homeless services system at the regional level. 2-1-1 serves as the statewide single point of entry to CANs.
- We support an increase to DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line by at least \$20 million in FY23 to expand the Rental Assistance Program (RAP), including \$2 million to provide rental assistance to 200 scattered-site supportive housing units for highly vulnerable individuals and families.
- We support an additional \$2.5 million in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line to establish and implement a proven eviction prevention model that leverages Right to Counsel legal services and couples them with high-quality social work to address vulnerable renter's needs.
- **We support the preservation of DOHS FY23 allocations the \$100 million bond authorization for Affordable Housing FLEX Fund** and \$50 million bond authorization for the state Housing Trust Fund

Additionally, We support the governor's proposed allocation of \$50 million in American Rescue Plan recovery funds to support the creation of 350 additional housing units affordable to households with incomes between 30% and 50% of area median income.

Homelessness is solvable. We need the housing, supportive services, and the people and infrastructure that support our most vulnerable residents to do it.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your hard work making important and life-saving decisions as we look to shape Connecticut's future beyond the pandemic—building a budget is like building a house, and with that, you must begin with a strong foundation. Your homeless response system is that foundation.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Paradis
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